

Blackboard & Triple Crown Dog Academy

Blackboard **ProSites**

Blackboard ProSites™ Helps Triple Crown Dog Academy Unleash Distance Learning

Triple Crown Dog Academy is located just outside of Austin, TX. The sprawling 360-acre facility boasts a 32,000 square foot climate controlled training and event center, pro shop, lighted sports field, beach club activity area, and a two-mile adventure trail—all for dogs. However, in addition to its eight luxury boarding suites, grooming center, and the Starmark line of pet products that are sold in 33 different countries, Triple Crown also has an international reputation as one of the premier centers for instructing professional dog trainers.

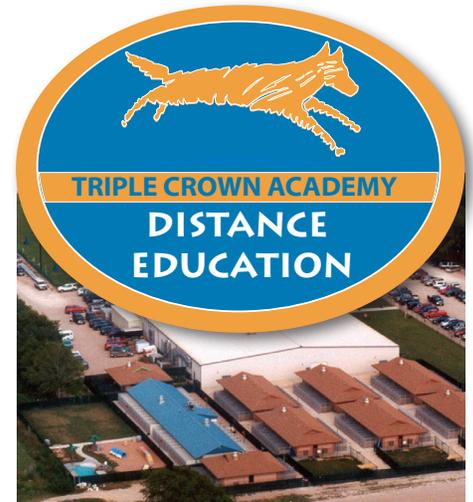
The program trains 120-150 students in six on-site sessions annually. Depending on the course of study and students' goals, classes can last from four to twelve weeks. The program entails full-time, hands-on instruction, and has drawn students from as far away as Japan. While the program has received accolades, one drawback has been that the full-time, on-site curriculum makes it difficult for prospective students to attend who cannot leave their jobs or families for such extended periods of time.

Keri Wilkinson, Academy administrator, points out, "We were missing lots of people who had the passion and desire, but couldn't make a twelve-week commitment."

Technology Provides A Great New Way to Train

The Academy had been aware of the reach that distance learning could provide, but was concerned about technological factors limiting its viability for the average student. Finally, at the end of 2007, Triple Crown hired a project manager to spearhead research into the different options—including whether to develop a proprietary system in-house or to purchase an off-the-shelf platform.

"We decided it was time to commit to a distance education program since so many people now have Internet access. And because the newer technology is able to handle video so much better than in the past, we could count on students being able to view recorded lessons, which are much more effective than reading instruction from a book," explained Keith Benson, Academy Director and President.



"It was the combination of the interactivity, the ease of creating content, and the affordability of the program that convinced us that Blackboard was what we'd been looking for to meet our specific needs."

Keith Benson
Triple Crown Dog Academy
Director and President

Blackboard ProSites Is Chosen As Best In Show

After a year-and-a-half of due diligence, the Academy finally chose Blackboard ProSites™. The primary reason for that decision was its ability to handle interactive content as well as promote interactivity among students. In addition to being able to accommodate the many PowerPoint and video presentations used in lessons, Benson says, “The discussion boards are also an integral part of the instruction. The more we can get students working together and interacting on projects, the greater their success.”

The ease of working with the technology was another critical factor in Triple Crown’s decision. Because the ProSites platform is delivered as software as a service (SaaS), the Academy is able to rely on Blackboard support for handling all system administration and maintenance, as well as any technical issues that might arise. This allows Triple Crown, an organization without extensive IT expertise or infrastructure, to focus on what it does best. In addition to making it easy to create and upload content, the ProSites system also enables off-site students to fully participate in the program through a simple and intuitive interface. For example, after they upload videos showing them working with their dogs, instructors are able to monitor their progress and offer constructive criticism. Students can also record problems they might be encountering in order to ask for suggestions from the trainers and other students.

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The Blackboard System Shows Why It’s Top Dog for Business Benefits

The Blackboard system was launched at the beginning of 2009, at the same time that Keri Wilkinson took over as Academy administrator. She anticipated a rocky start since the platform had been selected and implemented before her arrival, but describes the experience by saying, “Everything was very user friendly and the support that

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Blackboard provided was invaluable and tremendously helpful.” She has also found the discussion forum to be a powerful tool for engaging students and addressing their specific questions.

She goes on to say, “It’s all been very intuitive for the students. They’ve never had any problems accessing the discussion threads or uploading their videos. The only difficulties they’ve run into have been related to settings on their own computers or browsers.”

Triple Crown’s distance education program delivered the anticipated results within the first year of implementation. By reaching out to prospects who had inquired about the on-site program, 51 students from the U.S., Iceland, Canada, and Malaysia participated online.

Keith Benson describes the business benefits of the new online capabilities by saying, “Blackboard has allowed us to tap into many more potential students and gives us the opportunity to create many more programs for dog enthusiasts who can’t make it to Austin, TX to train with us.”

In addition to estimating the potential for 25% - 30% growth in annual revenue due to the online program, Benson believes it may ultimately be responsible for exponential growth in the Academy. He says, “The number of students participating in distance education with us is already approaching the same numbers as the on-site program. Since we only have so much space for housing students, I can see us growing our distance learning enrollment into hundreds of students annually.”

Triple Crown is also leveraging the connections it makes through distance education by offering students who complete that program a substantial discount if they decide to enroll in the on-site program to continue their training.

Triple Crown Academy is using Blackboard ProSites for

- + Increasing the range of its student population
- + Updating course content
- + Growing annual revenue
- + Bringing “serious” students on-site

For more information, contact your Blackboard Sales Representative or visit www.blackboardprosites.com